

**Transcript of Attorney General John Ashcroft Regarding Guilty Plea by Enaam
Arnaout
Media Availability Following Speech to Council on Foreign Relations
February 10, 2003**

Attorney General Ashcroft: With today's plea agreement, the government has secured the cooperation of Arnaout in the critical investigation into the funding of violence and violent acts overseas. The guilty plea also makes clear that we will prosecute and we will imprison those who would exploit the generosity of charitable donors to provide financing for violence overseas. We will shut down terrorist funding sources, we will ensure that terrorist sympathizers who fund violence or terrorism will meet swift and certain justice.

Arnaout defrauded donors by using their money to fund Jihad fighters in Chechnya and Bosnia. He provided fighters with anti-mine boots, uniforms, tents and even an ambulance. All of these were purchased with funds that donors thought were going for peaceful purposes.

While Mr. Arnaout has not admitted to supporting al Qaeda in this plea agreement, the government stands strongly behind those allegations. We are prepared to prove that he did support al Qaeda when that issue is addressed at sentencing. [emphasis added]

I commend the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois for securing today's guilty plea, and for their having secured a cooperation agreement and for vindicating the interests of honest humanitarian donors who expected that the donations they made would be used for humanitarian purposes. Yes?

Q: General, vis-a-vis the fact that the judge in the case had given the government an adverse ruling on hearsay and also possible problems with evidence being admitted from the search in Bosnia, were those factors in the government's decision to go with this guilty plea?

Attorney General Ashcroft: We believe this is a strong outcome, that this outcome will provide the basis for the cooperation of this defendant with the government in terms of information related to terrorist activities, the funding of terrorism and support for terrorism. And in that respect, we believe that this is an outcome which stands well on its own feet. Yes?

Q: Mr. Attorney General, you're meeting with the U.K. representatives today. I was wondering if you were going to raise with them that the pages 6 through 16 of the dossier released by Tony Blair to prove Iraq involvement with WMD and terrorism was plagiarized from a graduate school student's report 12 years ago and spiced up? This significantly embarrassed our secretary of State when he said this was a fine report at the United Nations.

Attorney General Ashcroft: I'll be speaking with representatives of Great Britain regarding law enforcement issues, and don't expect my remarks to go beyond those issues. Yes?

Q General, this morning the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA put out recommendations to the American people that under this orange high alert, they should set aside three days of water and food, duct tape and plastic sheeting for their homes, and put together emergency communication programs with their families. Can you comment on your feelings about that and why it's a good idea?

Attorney General Ashcroft: Well, I'm very pleased that the department is active in that arena. We're focused on finding those who are violating the law, prosecuting them, obtaining the kind of plea agreement that we obtained against Mr. Arnaout, and, in the absence of a plea agreement, going to trial and getting a conviction.

I'm not in a position to evaluate all -- I haven't seen the recommendations, although I think having a communications strategy and other planning makes sense for American families in regard to lots of things, including the potentials for natural disasters and tornadoes and the like. I know we have that in our home.

Q: As a follow-up question, General, do you think that there's a possibility that that type of recommendation could unnecessarily alarm people, or is it proportional?

Attorney General Ashcroft: I haven't seen the recommendation. I'm sure it's one that's constructed in good faith and with good sense. And I think from what you've mentioned to me, a lot of the things that you mention sound like the kind of things that my family and I care about. Yes?

Q: There have been a couple of published reports, General, that the Jewish-affiliated or Jewish-owned facilities or synagogues might be a particularly important category among these so-called soft targets. If that's correct, I wonder if you have any information or any particular advice or cautions or message for the American Jewish community.

Attorney General Ashcroft: Well, we've asked all Americans to understand that this is a high state of alert, and we believe that all Americans can participate in an elevated sense of observation so that no matter whose assets might be at risk, whether they be the petroleum industry, the energy industry, pipelines, whether it would be transportation facilities or the like, that we all have the capacity to be part of the war on terror. So with that in mind, we invite all Americans equally to be alert and to work hard to make sure that we remain as safe as possible. Yes?

Q: Can you confirm plans for an expansion on the USA Patriot Act, and also comment on why it's necessary?

Attorney General Ashcroft: Well, one of the things I do every day as attorney general is ask how we can do a better job; how can we improve our performance. I think this is one of the ways in which America has learned to be the top competitor in the world when it comes to business, when we've embraced an idea of continuous improvement. And that's a concept that we want to have in the Justice Department.

So every day we are asking each other, what can we do to be more successful in securing the freedoms of America and sustaining the liberty, the tolerance, the human dignity that America represents, and how can we do a better job in defeating the threat of terrorism. And we're going to do that on a daily basis. And there'll be discussion in our department, as often as I can prompt it, to make sure that we are as creative as possible in order to do that job. Now, there are guidelines in which we do that, and the most important guideline we have is the Constitution of the United States. So while we have on many occasions said to each other we've got to think outside the box, we've got to think of new and better ways to do things, we always understand that we've got to think inside the Constitution and protect the rights that are secured there.

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